after you

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after you

by amunet_rose

Summary

After Will's betrayal, both men find themselves lost without the other.
This is how they find each other again, while the world around them wakes up to the supernatural.

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sequel to lure

will

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The footsteps approaching echoed in my skull like a ringing bell.

I knew who the feet belonged to. They were attached to the last man on this earth I wanted to see.

It didn't matter if I wished him away, because Jack leaned against the side of my open garage despite not receiving an invitation to do so. I kept my greasy hands toying with the boat motor in front of me, roaming over the parts without any real intention, if only to keep my mind away from the man behind me. I hoped the tension would encourage him to leave, but Jack was never one to be effected by those kind of things.

Instead, he cleared his throat when he realized I wasn't going to speak first. "I had hoped you would come looking for me." I looked back at him and he crossed his arms over his chest. Smart to keep a wall between us. "But I understand why you didn't."

I returned my attention back to the motor, eying the rusted edges with oil slicked over them.

Push that screwdriver through his temple.

The thought made me flinch. Hannibal's voice again.

"What can I do for you, Jack?" I asked.

"I'm here to make sure you don't contradict the official narrative."

I scoffed.

"Well, we're officers of the FBI. Wounded in the course of heroic duty."

Do you imagine he bleeds the same as you? Hannibal's voice was so clear in my mind, I worried Jack would hear him. *Or do you bleed differently after me?*

"That's not true for either of us."

Another sigh. "We were supposed to go together. That's on me. My foul. My bad."

"Not all our choices are consciously calculated."

He sat with that statement for a moment before continuing. "No, but our decisions are."

I felt the next question bubbling in my own temples and tried to think of a good enough lie. I picked up the screwdriver to see how it felt in my hand.

"You remember when you decided to call Hannibal?"

Good boy.

I dropped the tool and looked at my shaking hands. The well was empty and I knew there wasn't a lie I could hide behind. No, Jack wanted the absolute truth and my days of dancing between identities was over.

"I wasn't decided when I called him," I confessed. "I just called him... I deliberated while the phone rang. I decided when I heard his voice."

"You told him we knew."

"*Yes?*" I heard Hannibal's voice in my ear like it was on the other end of the phone call. "*Will. Are you alright?*"

My gut twisted without mercy.

"I told him to leave," I said with a voice that was barely a whisper. "Cause I... wanted him to run."

"Why?" Jack pressed.

"*We couldn't leave without you*."

"Because I wanted to run away with him."

When the truth spilled from my mouth, I felt unbearably naked. My skin pricked like my father caught me in another lie and I stood, waiting for the sting of the belt.

I wanted to run away with him.

If I had... Abigail would be alive. We would all be together somewhere. A family.

"Have you told them what he is yet?" I dared to ask, desperate to pull myself from the thoughts in my head.

Jack was silent. My hands stopped moving as I waited until I finally turned to face my old friend. Jack's arms were no longer crossed, but there was a shadow of disgust still dancing around him. I deserved that, if anything.

"It took a while to convince myself I really saw what I saw. That it wasn't just some near-death hallucination."

I shook my head. "It wasn't a hallucination, Jack."

The man nodded solemnly. "Then our worst fears have been realized. If something like that exists... how many are there?"

I thought of Mason's ball, the hundreds of wealthy demons laughing around me. I could see them all staring in awe as the banshee was tortured for her screams. I saw the humans chained to marble columns.

I swallowed hard. "A lot."

"You knew the entire time, but never once mentioned it to anyone. Not even Alana."

I wanted to roll my eyes but refrained. "You thought I was a serial killer at one time, Jack. If I told you the truth, I'd lose all credibility with both you and the FBI."

He narrowed his eyes a bit and swallowed whatever insult was dancing inside his mouth.

Would he have preferred me to try and prove it? Like Beverly tried to?

Jack lifted his head and looked around my garage. "And you're just going to hide away in here, while those monsters exist?"

"Oh, that's exactly what I'm going to do," I turned back to my motor. My stomach was twisting like the knife was still inside me.

He had nothing to say to that.

"My days of being your dog are over. Find someone else."

I waited to hear the retaliation, the guilt trip, the manipulation. But it never came. Instead, I only heard footsteps leaving my garage until I was finally alone.

~*~

I barely have a scar from the silver knife he used. My surgeon almost praised the cut after sewing it shut. It seems Hannibal knew exactly where to cut me, deep enough to hurt but not enough to take my life.

The same couldn't be said for Abigail. For her, he cut with purpose.

I poured myself another cup of coffee while slipping two shots of whiskey inside. I've been drinking more lately, but can you blame me? Hannibal's absence is like a shadow peeking from behind every corner. A reminder of my debt and sin.

The bond between us was still there, fanning a dull ache in my chest. It's the same desperate longing I experienced when I was behind bars. The itch beneath my skin that nothing could satisfy, anxiety like a spooked horse, ready to run at any moment, sleepless nights and haunting dreams of him. All of it. Not even my dogs could distract me.

Alcohol helped, hence why I've been drinking more. It's only in a stupor that I feel some kind of relief.

I know I can't stay in Wolf Trap. After living as different versions of myself for so long, I have no idea who I actually am. Everything that was once the honorable Will Graham was scooped and scraped out. All that remained was whispers and regrets and pain and it was going to kill me if I didn't leave.

So after my coffee and some leftover pie, I went upstairs to try and pack. But pack for what? I'd been scouring the news for anything that might have his fingerprint. There was one killer in Alaska, who killed three people and then bound the bodies together to create a statue. However, before I could even book a flight, they caught the culprit and it wasn't Hannibal. My only good lead died thereafter.

So where was I going now?

"You have everywhere to go."

I looked up from my duffle bag to see a pair of red glowing eyes watching me. My heart skipped a beat, but I felt no relief in my chest. He wasn't real. He was never real. I continued packing my bag, ignoring the hallucination.

My neighbor will take care of my dogs if I pay her enough. I could plan, prepare and freeze their meals so it's easier. I don't know how long I'd be gone, but I could start with a week and work my way from there. There was a raw, guilty feeling in me as I planned this, like I was abandoning them. Giving up on them. My hands stilled.

"Are you running to me or from yourself?"

It was ridiculous to talk to a hallucination, no matter how detailed or vivid they may be. My mind was tormenting me, the bond forcing me to face what I lost.

"You know I'm waiting for you," the illusion whispered, closer to me now.

I shot straight up to look at him and as soon as I did, I could feel my eyes sting from the phantom's attention. He wore the same, amused expression, like he couldn't decide what part of me he wanted to consume first.

"Or is that what frightens you?" he asked, the corner of his lips pulling upward. "That I'm not waiting?"

"Stop," I begged while closing my eyes. It felt so real, but my skin itched and anxiety was like a noose around my neck. He wasn't here. He wasn't real. "Please."

"Will-"

"You didn't have to kill her," I choked out, cutting him off and daring to look at what my mind created before me.

His face fell and immediately, the illusion faded away until I was standing alone in my room.

My knees buckled as the fire consumed me. It always happened like this and when triggered, I was good for nothing, crumpled on the floor like a worn out tissue.

I choked on my sob, burying my face inside my palms. I was just so *angry*. Angry and sad and horribly alone. I could hear the dogs whining at my bedroom door, but I didn't let them in. Instead, I stayed curled on the floor, waiting for the waves of pain to subside so I could get my whiskey downstairs.

Then, cruelly, I felt a hand pressing against the side of my face. "Go to Margot," his gentle voice whispered, soft like a pillow and warm as the sun. "She'll help you."

Then everything became blurry and I slipped into unconsciousness.

~*~

When Margot saw me, her face fell a bit. She recovered nicely, but it didn't escape my notice.

I haven't been able to bring myself to look in the mirror, mostly because I was terrified of seeing another pair of eyes accompanying my own. But I didn't have to look to know bad I was. I haven't gotten a hair-cut in months, refused to shave and barely showered.

Margot, on the other hand, looked breathtaking. With her rise and Mason's fall, there was something dominant about her now. She wore a well-tailored, white pantsuit and beneath the low-cut vest, she was shirtless. It suited her so well, I blushed while admiring her.

She clasped her arm around mine like she did the last time I was at her estate. I shivered. It's been months since anyone has touched me.

"I've been trying to get a hold of you for months," she confessed as we walked through the grand entrance. "I thought about showing up with a bottle of whiskey..."

Her voice trailed off and I let it, imagining the foyer full of art and priceless relics, decorated to make the estate appear older than it was. Without them, it looked like every other rich asshole's mansion. Almost normal. But as we walked on, I could feel ghostly fingers curling around my side, holding me like he did that night.

"I think we're past whiskey visits, don't you?" she asked.

I didn't say anything in reply as she led us up a grand staircase made of white marble.

"We heard what happened," she continued despite my silence. "News travels fast on this side of the world."

"What have you heard?"

This time, she was slow to response, instead bringing us before two large, wooden double doors. Without knocking, the doors began opening, pulled by two servants on the other side. In the middle of the large bedroom, was Mason, propped up in a king sized bed.

"Well!" he exclaimed.

I was frozen, gawking at the monster before my eyes. Instead of his face, there was a plastic mask resembling a human with two holes for eyes in it. It reminded me of a mannequin or something you'd find in a haunted house. From the two holes in the mask, I could see Mason's wild, blue eyes darting back and forth, looking me up and down. It was horrifying.

"If it isn't Will Graham!" he giggled wildly. "Never thought I'd live to see *you* again!"

Margot's arm, still clasped around me, squeezed me slightly. With excitement or terror, I couldn't tell. Maybe it was both. "We've managed to keep Mason heavily sedated," she said with a smile on her face. "It makes him *happier*, right Mason?"

"You bet!" he sang, though it was muffled from behind the mask. "Nothing like Dr. Lecter's concoction though!"

I averted my gaze at the mention of Hannibal, feeling like an arrow pierced my stomach. I must have gone pale or started sweating, because Margot noticed.

"Shut up, Mason," she hissed, turning me so my back was facing the monster in his bed. "Will, are you alright? You don't look well."

"I'm fine," I lied. "C-Can we get some air?"

She took my hand and led me out of Mason's room, down a long hallway until we reached a master suite. Past the most comfortable looking bed I've ever seen, which I assumed must belong to Margot, was a large balcony overlooking the backend of their estate. The fresh air was like steady hands on either side of my face and I grew calmer by the second.

"I thought it would have pleased you to see him like that. It was insensitive and cruel of me. I'm sorry."

It wasn't hard to see why she'd think that. After all, I was right beside Hannibal when he made a mockery of Mason. I was greedy with the feeling of it, being the reason for Hannibal's wrath. I wanted to see Mason suffer, after seeing and hearing all he'd done. Then I was so pleased with the job, I let Hannibal ravish me that night.

I swallowed hard. "No, I'm glad I saw him. I've just been... more unstable than stable lately."

She nodded her head and her pity-filled eyes roamed all over me, as if she would find the open wound Hannibal left and sew it shut herself. "How can I help?"

I didn't realize until that moment that I didn't have any real intentions when I showed up to the Verger estate. The illusion of Hannibal told me to and I listened without much thought beyond that.

Now Margot was standing in front of me, waiting for an answer I didn't have.

"I don't know," was all I could say.

"Do you want to find him?"

"Yes." I heard the word come out of my mouth and was shocked at how quickly it released itself.

Margot looked out at the large metal barns that housed thousands upon thousands of animals. All that money squealing away, knowing nothing but the metal walls surrounding them.

"I... I tried." When I looked down at my hands they were shaking.

"I know," she answered plainly, still looking at the back gardens. "I don't have to read your mind to know how he's haunting you."

I almost forgot about Margot's gift. It must be how she knew I was on the verge of a panic attack at the mere mention of Hannibal's name. Whatever words I was trying to form as a way of explaining weren't needed and I couldn't have been happier. What words can be strung together that would accurately describe what I'm going through?

"There are rumors, but nothing concrete. I won't send you on a fool's errand, Will."

My heart sank. Why would he send me here if it was hopeless?

"I do, however, know someone who might."

She turned away from the balcony railing and looked back into her bedroom. I followed her gaze until my eyes landed on a tall figure, sitting on the edge of her bed.

Pale, slender and strikingly beautiful with her painted black lips, sat Evelyn Drusilla.

She had a long cigarette holder dangling from her hand, eying the both of us like she caught us doing something naughty.

"I remember you," I said stupidly.

She stood, took a long drag of her cigarette and blew the blue smoke into the air like a goddess incarnate. "Hello, sweet thing."

Margot approached her and I followed, realizing she didn't join us on the balcony because the sun was shining brightly above us. "What are you doing here?"

The vampire smirked, curling a long, slender finger around one of Margot's curls. "A trip of pleasure, right my darling?"

A beautiful blush crept up Margot's neck. "Exceedingly."

"You are looking for Dr. Lecter?" Evelyn asked. "The rumors are not pleasant, I'm afraid. Are you sure you want to find him?"

"I'm sure," I answered, not knowing where the confidence was coming from.

She took a drag from her cigarette before continuing. "I've known Hannibal for over a century, but he is skillfully allusive. I can go years without hearing or seeing him. Like the wind, he goes where he pleases. Rumor is he hides in Madrid, some say Milan. Only one will know where."

"Who?" I asked impatiently, not in the mood for poetic conversation. I didn't know what direction I was heading in only moments ago, but now I felt the alarming urgency of my path like it was destined for me.

"His aunt."

My heart stopped.

"Lady Murasaki."

Chapter End Notes

i hope i can entertain you again

Hannibal

Chapter Summary

Hannibal remains on the path of destruction, revenge and ruin.

Chapter Notes

WARNING: graphic depictions of violence, gore and murder. dark hannibal, ladies and gentleman

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Bright green eyes flashed fury alongside their terror.

Though it was honorable to take death with some dignity, I was not interested in seeing dignity. The woman's pride only forced me to push further.

Between my large hands, her head shook wildly, trying to escape my thumbs as they crept towards her eyes. Yes, I think I will take them. They're lovely, and she was using them to glare. I'm unable to abide to such a waste of their use.

"Xenophobia is a disease," I whispered, pressing my thumbs harder against the corner of her eyes. They bulged from the pressure. "And I find myself thrilled with the idea of snuffing it out before you have a chance to infect another."

She tried one more time to shake her head out of my grip, but it was useless. My fingers dug into the sockets without mercy. Her pride finally fell and she began screaming.

I closed my eyes at the sound, feeling the hot blood and fluid seep out over me like a waterfall. It's flow made everything vibrate to life. Nothing like before, like when *his* blood lived inside me, but similar enough to soothe some of the ache I felt. Pushing further, the tips of my thumbs hit her soft brain.

"Someone important will hear her," I heard a voice say from the other side of the bridge underpass.

I opened my eyes to see Chiyoh leaning against a concrete pillar. She was picking at her nails with the sharp end of a pocket knife—a habit she picked up as a child, along with the cunning ability to watch from the shadows, silent as a mouse.

"Almost every culture has a hatred for another. I've grown used to it."

The screams lessened as the woman's life escaped her. I twisted my fingers from the eye sockets and pulled her close, sinking my teeth in to drain whatever was left. The tang I tasted in her blood was from unfiltered, and overwhelming fear. The emotion changes the chemistry of the dead, but I've grown used to the flavor since leaving Baltimore.

"If you plan on killing everyone who gives me a dirty look, there will be no one left."

Drained and useless, I threw the woman on the floor.

Chiyoh sighed, pushing from the concrete to walk towards me, twirling the knife in her hand as she did so.

While wiping my mouth with a handkerchief, I looked down at the mangled body and realized I didn't want to turn her into anything. That specific inspiration remained with Will. He kept it, along with everything else.

"Did you find the witch?" I asked.

We've been in Paris for two nights, following a lead Chiyoh vowed would bring us to Bedelia. The witch we sought in France, however, was not the lovely, blue-eyed doctor I've known for centuries. We were looking for a shunned witch, from a rumored coven hidden beneath the Louvre.

"The second district, from what I've gathered. Near the Opera House. She orders about a horde of child pick pocketers. My source says we will know when we find her."

"After you, then," I offered.

Though it would be wise to get rid of the body, Chiyoh led us from beneath the underpass silently. She knew I was of no use idle or worse—bored. Those were the true enemies now.

When my body or mind stilled, the pain returns like a foolhardy thief. Then I see nothing but blue eyes, devious smiles and clever lies. What follows that, is monstrous.

More monstrous than I am now.

Since finding me in my castle, frozen in agony, Chiyoh followed this burst of ambition. Despite my hatred for the French monarchy (though that's long been dead), the idea of finding Bedelia was delicious enough to lure me to the reeking city. I'd do anything to find the witch who toyed with me and dared to think she could escape the consequences that follow.

Now that wrath and vengeance were my only relief, she would rue the day she crossed my path.

When you play, you pay.

Not even the ancient witch, Bedelia Du Maurier, could escape that.

The second district of Paris was unruly at night. There was more crime, along with a variety of sex shops. The Opera House was the one shining gem in the area, the only thing inviting tourism.

At first, I thought the witch would appear as a prostitute, luring victims away before robbing them blind. The French always had an affinity for prostitution *and* dramatics.

Instead, she stood on the corner of a darkened alleyway, looking like a old beggar woman. It was as if she sprang to life from one of the Germanic fairy tales I would tell Mischa beneath the covers; the ones mother forbid me from telling.

"*I'm not afraid*," Mischa would declare. "*I'm not afraid of anything*."

"That's her." Chiyoh's voice pulled me from my mind and kept me in the present.

The old woman looked up as if she heard us, hiding from beneath a torn scarf with only her sharply hooked nose visible. She was holding a sign, begging for money. Beside her, were a few dirty children in torn clothes, but they ran away as we approached them.

"Vile creatures!" the old woman hissed. "What do two of Lucifer's children want with an old woman like me?"

Chiyoh was the first to speak. "Yvon Janvier sends his regards."

"Janvier? I do not know anyone by that name."

Chiyoh sighed. "I will give you one more chance."

The old woman smiled, revealing a row of rotten teeth.

"The Louvre. How does one get in?" Chiyoh asked patiently.

Instead of answering, the witch's bulging black eyes landed on me. My temples burned hot from her inspection.

"I'm not afraid," she breathed, pulling the memory of Mischa from my mind like a fisherman pulling in a net. "*I'm not afraid of anything*."

I quickly lost my patience, shoved past Chiyoh and dragged the woman down the dark alley. With one hand wrapped around her throat and another around her wrist, I slammed the witch into the bricks behind. She gasped from the force.

"Do you know that when eaten, witches flesh induces a sensation similar to the effects of heroin?" My voice was steady, though my insides were red with rage. "It's been some time since I've enjoyed it."

I brought her wrinkled hand closer to my nose and inhaled, smelling past the dirt and grime to reach the blood underneath.

"My friend asked you a question," I whispered. "Answer her and I may stop after one finger."

The woman nodded as best she could, so I let her feet touch the ground. She took a moment to catch her breath, rubbing over her throat to soothe the sting of my previous grip. When our gaze met again, I was presented with stern eyes. Real ones.

It was then, that I could see the young woman hiding in the old woman's face. *Cursed,* I thought happily.

"The Winged Victory of Samothrace," she revealed in a hoarse voice.

One of the oldest and most significant statues in the world. An original Greek sculpture.

"*She* must climb up to it," she informed while pointing a bony finger towards Chiyoh, standing beside us, "Place your hand between Niké's breasts and whisper to Hecate: Άνοιξε, Εκάτη. It must her, or else it will not work."

Chiyoh opened her mouth to thank her, but before she could, I lifted the witch's hand to my mouth and bit off her index finger.

The woman howled into the night sky, falling to her knees and gripping the bleeding hand to her chest.

I chewed on flesh and bone, while closing my eyes to enjoy her scream. The meat wasn't particularly delicious, but I could immediately feel the magical effect.

I imagined what Will might do if he were standing beside me. Would he curse me for taking the witch's finger? Or would I see the same eyes I beheld while torturing Mason Verger? *Starving*.

When I swallowed, the woman was no longer screaming, but whimpering in pain. I crouched down to reach her eyes. She refused to return the favor and I allowed her the discourtesy.

"If you are a liar, I'll find you and eat the rest," I vowed, grabbing her chin to force our eyes to meet. "And I always keep my promises."

~*~

Turning myth into fact pleased me a great deal.

The flesh I ate left me dazed and drugged, my mental defenses weakened beyond measure. It allowed Will to emerge from the room he haunted in my memory palace. The one I always kept sealed shut.

What would it be like to eat Bedelia?

Will was around every corner, standing beside every painting and peeking from the backs of every statue. Accompanying the hallucinations, was relief from the itch beneath my skin and the ache in my chest. A hundred times more satisfying than hearing the scream of my victims.

If careful, I could make Bedelia's flesh last for months. The very idea of visiting this state of mind again made my insides twist with delight.

"All this way, for *her*?"

I stopped in my tracks. We were inside the Louvre and I was following Chiyoh through the glass covered courtyards. I don't remember how we snuck inside, but when I looked down at my hands, they were covered in blood. The full moon shining above turned the color black, like I stood in a dream.

Surrounding us were ancient statues, carved from white marble, and placed along a series of stairs. The shadows casting over their eyes made them look alive, as if they were watching to see what I'd do next.

At the top of the stairs, stood Will Graham.

I swallowed hard at the sight of his image and felt my body tense as if stricken with a million needles.

"If I'd had known how close the two of you were," he began, while descending a couple of steps. "I might have been jealous."

A chuckle erupted from me and I shook my head. My mind created him *masterfully*, down to every strand of perfectly curled hair. He wore a button down shirt, the color of salmon, and gray slacks with a black belt. Both of his hands were hidden in pockets, with a gray jacket flung over one of his arms.

"You couldn't finish the job with me," Will smirked. "How easy, though, for you to finish Dr. Du Maurier."

"Would you have preferred me to see it through to the end, then?" I asked.

His cheeks reddened, as if my mind was dying to see it again. I hardened with desire. For him, his blood, his mind. All of it.

"Anything is better than this," Will hissed, finally close to me. The stormy, blue eyes searched both of mine for something good, something to keep him here. I could sense the disappointment when he found nothing of the sort. "*Hannibal*-"

"Hannibal!"

I opened my eyes to see Chiyoh in front of me. I was standing in the courtyard with no blood on my hands. My friend was gawking at me, as if she had tried to get my attention multiple times before I heard her.

"Witch's flesh," she scoffed. "How do you know it's not cursed?"

"It feels too good to be a curse," I admitted.

Her eyes darkened a little. "Then let's not delay and find Bedelia. I would like to try it."

When I looked back towards the stairs, the image of Will was gone.

The Winged Victory of Samothrace waited in the lower levels of the Louvre, chiseled from white Parian marble and dating back to the beginning of the 2nd century BCE. It was the goddess of Victory, *Nikè*, alighting on the bow of a warship.

She was missing a head and two arms, but the two, large wings spread out behind her remained. It gave her a haunting quality, not quite standing, but finishing her flight. Hermann Thiersch, the sculptor, multiplied the effects on the folds of her tunic, plated against her body to enhance and reveal its shape.

She interacts with the space around her, as if she's fighting the wind while landing. It plays with you, inviting you into the action. The Statue of David is similar, Michelangelo carving David's gaze and pose to show where he is seeing his adversary, Goliath, and his awareness of the moment.

When I looked again, Will stood on the bow of the marble ship instead of the goddess. The folds in his tunic rippled from the wind, giant wings flapping behind as he landed.

My chest tightened where my heart used to pump with life. Being a god suited Will.

As if hearing my thoughts, his playful eyes landed on me. The bow in his hand was already knocked with an arrow.

He smiled before releasing it's fire upon me.

"Hannibal!" Chiyoh called.

I opened my eyes. Chiyoh was already standing on the marble bow, beside the goddess.

"What are you waiting for?" I asked impatiently.

She took a deep breath, visibly irritated, and placed her pale hand over the goddess' chest. The saying, which translated from Greek meant, *Hail, Hecate*, echoed into the air from Chiyoh's lips.

The energy around us thickened and grabbed ahold of me like hands of dead souls I've vanquished. Chiyoh jumped off the ship's bow and to my amazement, I watched the ancient statue slide backwards.

Where she stood before was now a small, black opening. A staircase.

We didn't waste time and quickly descended down the stairs, as if creeping our way into the depths of hell.

Each step was more treacherous than the last, all of them different from the other in height and width. Thankfully, because Chiyoh and I are creatures of the dark, we moved with ease.

At the end of the descending tunnel, was a bright light. When reached, you stepped through it and entered into a giant, cathedral-like hall.

I found myself stunned by its beauty. The tall ceilings were decorated with elaborate paintings, some relaying the beginnings of earth and others depicting tales of Hecate. It reminded me of when I first arrived in France, in the early 1700s. Before the run of blood and piss tarnished the streets forever.

The hall was lit up with an array of cleverly placed mirrors, reflecting light back and forth to one another, though I couldn't see where the light was coming from.

At first, it appeared as if butterflies were flying near the many mirrors, but upon further inspection, I could see that they were moths.

The realization pulled me to the center of the room, with Chiyoh following behind me. Graven in the floor, was the depiction of a giant death moth. The skull on it's back had black gems for eyes that glittered from the different rays of light. I looked back up. *Death moths*.

They were beautiful. Omens of death but graceful in it's delivery.

Without effort, the magnificent carvings seemed to replace the skull graven on the floor of my memory palace. Covering up what I was with what I am now. An omen of death.

"That is far enough, *vampyre*."

We turned to see a hooded figure standing behind us, appearing from nowhere and everywhere.

"Your kind is not welcome here."

I raised my chin, looking down at her. The effects from the witch in the alley were already wearing off. It took a great deal of self control to stop me from biting off another piece.

"Pardon our intrusion," I announced, instead of mauling her. "My friend and I are looking for someone. If you would be so kind to tell us what you know of her, will be on our way."

The figure, hidden beneath her long cloak, remained silent for a moment. Witches were no match for a grown vampire. Words, therefore, must be chosen wisely.

I looked around the hall once more, memorizing it's beauty. Just how long can this space exist as humans continued to progress? The head of the FBI Behavioral Science Unit knows the truth about my kind. How long until this coven is brought into the light?

"Do you know the whereabouts of Bedelia Du Maurier?" Chiyoh asked, her voice lined with impatience.

The woman tilted her head slightly. "*Sorcière des Saules* belongs to no coven."

Witch of the Willows?

In the decades I've known Bedelia, I've never heard her called by that name. I took a step towards the witch, feeling her energy already pushing against me. It pleased me to see her so threatened. She was wise to, for I was loosing my patience with every second the ache in my chest intensified.

"Tell me where she is," I demanded.

"For every favor, there is another granted. For every life, there is death waiting," the mysterious woman responded, fighting against my intimidation.

Chiyoh snarled behind me. "What do you want?"

The hooded figure took a few steps towards us, until standing on the back of the carved death moth. The air around her thick with greed.

"The ruby."

With Will's eyes behind my own, I imagined he'd be dying to satisfy his curiosity, along with mine. What was so powerful about Bedelia's ruby? What would witches from an ancient coven want with it?

No matter. I held my hand out to her. "Do we have an accord?"

The witch held up her arm to reveal a pale hand with long, slender fingers. It was the only piece of herself she revealed. There were no markings, no tattoos, nothing to reveal anything about her. All I could gather was her youth, though with witches, that was never an accurate guesstimate.

"Do not take this oath lightly," she warned, one of her fingers twitching in anticipation. "Our goddess does not like being made a fool of."

"Good." I grasped her hand tightly, but the witch didn't even flinch, only squeezed back harder. "Neither do I."

Our hands began burning with heat as the oath sealed. Then, after a moment, I felt our hands flutter with movement. I let go of her and when she opened her hand, a small death moth stretched out its wings on her palm.

I watched in utter amazement, the physical structure of our oath before my very eyes. I looked up at the many flying near the brightly lit mirrors. Are all of those oaths? Promises? Lives they've held hostage from such deals?

The moth flapped its wings until it finally took flight, flashing the patterned skull before flying up towards the ceiling.

"She passed through here, not long ago," the witch finally revealed. "Searching for something, though I cannot reveal what she sought."

My fangs lengthened, as if they knew we'd catch her soon.

"Her findings took her to Italy. Florence, to be precise."

It was as if the Fates themselves set her path. Florence was one of my favorite places on the planet. I dreamed of showing Will and Abigail every inch of it.

Now, I can paint it with witch's blood.

Chapter End Notes

do i know where this is going? vaguely.
will everything go according to plan? probably not.
enjoy<3

Will

Chapter Summary

Will meets Lady Murasaki

Chapter Notes

No cute little picture at the beginning because my laptop is broken and I hate doing it on my phone<3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It could be a rumor.

Probably one Hannibal started, curious to see how the dominoes would fall.

Evelyn seemed genuine enough, but most of her kind do. It's their greatest weapon; appearing like a friend. All shining eyes and big smiles, without fangs or threat. It's why they've survived in the shadows for so long.

Evelyn could be the same as all the rest. Offering me her private jet with hopes of being the first to know if the fabled Lady Murasaki exists. Perhaps it's a way to have me indebted to her. Vulnerable so she could then act without mercy.

It didn't really matter, because I would use her anyway.

My power was now weakened beyond measure. The ruby that once helped harness my abilities, no longer glowed to life in my hands. The shadows were only faint whispers, like when I was a child.

Hannibal left me less than broken and I wasn't strong enough to keep crawling through the muck of my heartbreak, only to drown myself in liquor.

So when I stepped onto Romanian soil, the energy thrust new life into me. It felt like I was finally standing and able to see the path at my feet. I didn't know what I'd do when I reached the end of it, but I know where it leads. Nothing else mattered. I would do anything to find him and end my agony. I'd use them all. Evelyn, Margot, Jack and any fool in Baltimore, if it meant getting to him.

Lady Murasaki is the best lead I've gotten in months. I wasn't going to throw that opportunity away.

I kept my expectations low when I couldn't find anything about her on the internet. The only woman consistently mentioned was a Japanese novelist, poet and lady-in-waiting. She was alive in the Imperial court during the Heian period. Not likely to be the same women, though Hannibal showed me anything is possible.

When I saw Bran Castle, hope kindled in my chest.

It was built on the mountainside, so no matter where you stood in the small town of Bran, you could see it looming over you like a god. It's tall, white-bricked walls, and bright red roof seemed to sparkle in the setting sun, glowing in deep reds and oranges.

If Hannibal's relative is anything like him, she would enjoy the dramatics of living inside such a terrifying, yet beautiful, place. It's the same castle said to have inspired Count Dracula in Bram Stoker's famous novel.

My enthusiasm was stunted a second time, however, when I went for a tour during the last few hours of daylight.

It was your typical tourist destination. There were plaques everywhere and television screens depicting stories about vampires and Dracula. The furniture was no doubt old, but nothing original.

How could anyone possibly live inside of it now?

"Pales in comparison to the days of it's glory," Hannibal whispered in my ear after I climbed to the third story. I ignored him and walked out to the watchman's post, not reading the plaques, but letting my eyes linger there. If I looked at my own hallucination, I'd be defeated by it. "It fought against the Ottoman Empire's expansion. Kings slept here and now anyone can visit if they have twenty-five euros."

If I replied, I would only be talking to myself.

Still, I couldn't help but enjoy the sound of him. Even if it wasn't real. To hear him prattle on about histories and beliefs was as comforting as it was painful.

"Vlad the Impaler lived here, did he not?" Hannibal continued beside me. "The inspiration for Dracula, Will, and for good reason. I wonder if you could see the shadows left behind, if you weren't so weak without me."

"*Stop*," I whispered. To myself, to him, maybe even to god. My hands were shaking now. I enjoyed him for too long.

"Do you imagine you have access to the *entire* castle? Surely there are rooms you're unable to go in. Come on now, Will. Where is your glorious imagination? Haven't I trained you better than that?"

I shook my head, holding my hands up against my ears like I could block him out.

"If humans can fool you so easily, I can only imagine what my aunt will do to you-"

"Sir?"

My scream echoed into the sky and vibrated on the stones around us. I looked towards the voice and saw a stranger attempting to calm me down.

"Sir, I'm sorry, are you okay? You look like you're having a fit. Shall I go find some staff for you?" the old British man stuttered, patting my shoulder gently.

Hannibal was nowhere to be found. I shook my head. "No, no, I'm fine. Sorry, I have a fear of heights and thought this wouldn't be bad. I'll just go get some water. Thank you."

The old man nodded his head. "Be sure to skip the tower then, son. It's the highest point in the castle."

I muttered my thanks and quickly made for the exit. I needed a drink while I waited for the sun to go down.

There was a sign at the exit, a big one with red letters.

Thank you for visiting Bran Castle!
Please remember to refrain from all
unnecessary travel after sunset.
You never know what lurks in the shadows!

~*~

It didn't shock me to discover how bare security was around the castle. I didn't spot any cameras and the only guard I saw was stationed outside the inner gate. He was snoring in his seat, unaware of me climbing over the rock wall that surrounded the castle, not even a few paces away.

Inside a backpack slung over my shoulder, was a bolt cutter, a flashlight and a silver knife. The same one Hannibal used to slice my stomach open. The ruby was in my pocket, though it seemed useless now. I doubt I could even see shadows from the dead, let alone speak and command them.

The moon was not quite full, but whole enough to light up the outer gardens and pond below. The smell of cheap tourism was now gone. When I crept down the cobblestone walkway, I could imagine lords from a hundred years ago strolling towards the castle for some banquet.

It could have been because I was alone, or because of the moon, or half the bottle of whiskey bubbling in my bloodstream, but the castle felt *hauntingly* still. Each time I looked up at it, I imagined glowing eyes peering down at me from the windows.

The servants entrance to the east of the grounds was the easiest to break into. I clipped the lock with my bolt cutter, replaced the tool with my flashlight and slowly opened the door.

As soon as I did, a hot gust of wind hit my face, like something was escaping the darkness.

Then, very subtly, I began to hear faint whispers.

After Hannibal left, shadows were mostly silent, even when I was surrounded by death. During Alana's funeral, I expected to hear remnants of her soul left behind. If anyone would have fought for life, it would have been her. I saw her body, so massacred that it was a closed-casket affair. No one wants to go that way, but even so, Alana remained as silent as a lamb.

Now, in the entryway of Bran Castle, I could hear whispers like the shadows were standing right beside me. They spoke in a language I didn't recognize, but my heart hurt for them all the same.

They fought over one another to be heard and as I crept through the castle, looking for any sign of life (or lack thereof), they grew louder.

"Vă rog!" a woman's voice cried. "Ai milă de sufletul meu. Vă rog! Vă rog!"

The whispers soon became screams, as if they were furious at my lack of understanding. By the time I reached the third floor balcony, I was desperate to escape them. Beneath the moon, I dropped my flashlight, boxed in my ears and crouched down, trying foolishly to muffle out their cries.

How was I supposed to find a vampire, when the darkness inside the castle was so merciless? So much evil and death happened within it's walls, the very air felt poisonous.

"O vreau pe mama mea! Mama! Mama!" A child this time.

When I opened my eyes to look for the shadow, I couldn't find it. The child was crying and I felt my own chest tighten with emotion.

Higher, Will.

Hannibal's voice came like an angel from above. I stood and ran down the balcony, not stopping until I reached the ladder that would take me to the tower.

It was the highest point in the castle, as the old man said before. I didn't stop to think about why I climbed, I just climbed.

When at the top, high in the sky, the screams dulled into whispers once more. I let out a deep breath, gripping the railing and looking over the large open expanse of wilderness. Directly below was the town of Bran, which looked smaller than a thumbnail from my height.

I pulled out the ruby from my pocket. It was as dull as I'd ever seen it.

How could I find Lady Murasaki with all the noise?

"*My, my,*" a feminine voice cooed.

I spun around and my eyes landed on a tall, pale woman, standing on the other side of the tower. For the first time in months, the ruby grew hot in my palm. The heat I felt was unmistakable.

The wind blew through the woman's long, midnight hair and beautiful kimono. Though my flashlight was on the balcony below, the moon glowed against her flawless skin, enough so that I could see how beautiful she was. A real life Persephone, waiting for Hades to come get her.

A few moments later, I noticed the voices of the dead scattered with the wind, escaping back into the dark corners of the castle below.

"I haven't smelled something like you in over three hundred years," the woman said, her villainous voice dripping with dark energy. It didn't match the pleasant features on her face and though I was previously transfixed by her beauty, I was now strikingly aware that this was Hannibal's relative.

Lady Murasaki.

The tower was small enough so that in three steps, she was right before me. My heart began hammering with fright, but I couldn't look away from her eyes. They were glowing red like Hannibal's, narrow and piercing. The ruby was burning my palm, protecting me from whatever supernatural power she had.

"I know your nephew."

I felt a hand tighten in my curls before I saw her move. She arched my neck and hovered her nose above the crook of my neck, inhaling deeply.

Being beside Hannibal for so long made me forget about my own mortality. I wasn't nearly strong enough to fight someone like her. The silver dagger was in my backpack, uselessly tucked away. In my hurry to abandon the voices of the dead, I left myself completely unarmed.

"I'm bonded to him," was the only thing I could think of to say, out of desperation.

"I know," the woman replied. "You *reek* of him. Among other things."

After inhaling one more time, she finally released me. I stumbled backwards. Then with what felt like a gust of wind, I was swept off my feel and the world was spinning.

~*~

When I opened my eyes, we were inside a room I hadn't seen on the tour earlier that day. It was a large library, with ancient-looking tapestries donning the walls besides the dozens of full book cases. Only candles and the fire from a giant fireplace lit up the room. I was sitting on one of the two armchairs before it.

Lady Murasaki was leaning against a bookcase on the other side of the room. Instead of books living on its shelves, there were many vials and jars containing liquids in all shades of dark. She was inspecting something in her hands, an object I couldn't make out from my distance, before peering up to me.

I took the moment to assess my situation. She hadn't killed me yet, which meant there was something she wanted. Two doors on either side of the room were my possible exits, though I doubt I'd make it thee steps before she captured me.

"Where did you get this?"

At the sound of the woman's soft, soulful voice, all futile plans of escape scattered in the wind. She held the mysterious object in her hand higher in the air, allowing the gem to glisten from the flickering firelight.

My ruby.

"Someone gave it to me for protection."

She eyed me for what felt like an eternity. I couldn't tell if she was impressed or insulted by how evasive I was in my answer.

"A mate," she hissed, slipping the ruby inside the sleeve of her kimono. She fingered some of the vials on the bookcase beside her, touching each one tentatively before finally grabbing one off the shelf. "He finally bonds and it's with a human."

I didn't pretend to be insulted, instead I kept my eyes on her while she approached my chair. The kimono she wore was the color of a tropical shoreline, with red dragons breathing fire all over her arms.

"You're his aunt," I managed to say.

She was only a few steps distance, looking down at me with darkening eyes, like I was amusing her.

She held the vial out to me and I only stared at the black liquid inside it.

"If I wanted you dead, you would not be breathing before me now. And I certainly would not use poison."

Yes, but poison wasn't the only nefarious ingredient that worried me. The supernatural world was still a mystery, but full of endless possibilities. Your worst nightmare could lurk just around the corner.

"I do not trust humans," Lady Murasaki continued, her expression growing impatient. "This will ensure you speak to me true."

Something rebellious stirred in my gut. Not enough to refuse her, no, but enough to tempt fate. I would either walk out of the castle alive, or I wouldn't. Both could end my agony.

The contents of the vial was similar to that of a thick syrup and tasted like ground up chalk. I waited for my throat to close, or my vision to go, but after a few moments, I didn't feel any different.

Seemingly satisfied, Lady Murasaki walked to the other arm chair adjacent to the one I was in, and sat down gracefully. She brushed her long, midnight black hair over one shoulder and let her hands fold neatly in her lap. Though extremely regal, there was nothing rigid about her. The delicate frame of her shoulders neither tensed, nor slouched.

"Why are you separated?" she asked.

"I betrayed him." The answer came without mercy or thought behind it. "He sliced open my gut and left me to die."

She looked as if she was fighting an oncoming smile, something reminiscent about her expression. "So gentle. I did not think it was possible."

Gentle? I bit my tongue before the truth escaped.

"Why do you seek him now?"

My stomach twisted. "I miss him."

"Do you plan on killing him?"

"Maybe."

"There is no room for indecisiveness at my table, boy. Maybe is not good enough."

"I haven't decided yet."

She peered at me while I grappled with how familiar the conversation felt. How familiar *she* felt. It was a therapy session with Dr. Lecter, but flavored with a fevered sweetness. He wasn't here, but a whisper of him was. It vibrated around Lady Murasaki.

I wasn't just looking at Hannibal's aunt. I was looking into the eyes of his creator, in every sense of the word.

"Are you a poet?"

The question amused her enough to warrant a small grin. "Court life is full of shocking scandals, falling like petals from the cherry tree. It was my pleasure to elevate it into art."

I was speaking to a walking relic. She must be over a thousand years old.

"What would the shadows tell you about me, I wonder, if you were not as weak as you are."

My throat tightened. "How do you...?"

"Nothing is hidden from me. I can smell it on you."

I shook my head. "How? He took it with him when he left."

"No he didn't."

I furrowed my brows with confusion. Instead of answering, she slipped a hand into one of her sleeves, pulling out my ruby. She held it before me once more, pinched between her thumb and forefinger.

"Death harbors no judgement. It will take from the great as well as the small. Past it's veil, nothing remains secret. Or hidden."

My heart began hammering in my chest, attention glued to the red crystal. For nearly a year, it protected me. A harbor for whatever power lives inside me. At the height of everything, I was able to command without uttering a word, without even holding it.

"You do not know who you are, Will Graham."

My stomach ached from the truth of her statement. I didn't know myself as well as I did when I was with him. At the time I thought I was playing a part to deceive him, that I wasn't being myself.

My power was strongest then. Beside him. The acting meshed together with the truth and overlapped beyond understanding.

"Death doesn't entertain imaginings. It's resolute, as you must be in order to harness it."

"Then I need to find him."

She lowered the ruby, letting her hands sit on her lap once more. "Hannibal is my nephew. If you intend to harm him, how can I betray that which is my own kin?"

"Because if you're anything like him, you'd be curious to know if I'd actually do it. If I can."

Her eyes brightened with excitement. Another small smirk spread over her plump, red lips. "You are amusing, for a human. Bold, like she used to be."

My words died in my mouth. Was she talking about Mischa? My throat itched with all the questions I buried inside me. Whatever truth serum she gave me, made them all fight for release. "What happened to her?"

I could practically hear the thoughts in her head. *You're his mate, and you don't know a thing about him?*

"When I married their uncle, Robert, Hannibal was just a child; Mischa an infant. Poland was at war with Russia and Lithuania paid the price for it. When the king and queen were murdered, Robert and I left our dwelling in France to take care of the children left behind."

My mouth fell open in shock. "The king and queen? They were... so does that mean?"

Lady Murasaki nodded, her aura oozing pride. "They are of a royal bloodline, Hannibal and Mischa both."

Of *course* he was. It was far more shocking that such a truth evaded my attention, than it was to hear it from a thousand year old vampire. Hannibal reeked of entitlement that only royalty

could bring. His dignity, impeccable taste and fussy aesthetics. It made perfect sense.

"As they grew, I saw great potential in them both. Hannibal's perception and senses were sharper than a grown man. Mischa was fierce for a young girl and to my knowledge, not afraid of anything. Her fighting abilities and swiftness far out-shined Hannibal's.

"So when my Robert died, I turned all attention to them, vowing to train and eventually turn them when they each turn eighteen, respectfully."

I imagined what Mischa might have looked like. Would she be tall and lean like Hannibal? With the same colored eyes?

"The war did not end, it only worsened. Poland demanded Lithuanian language and customs to be abolished, due to it's ties to Russia and Latin descent. Hannibal was just shy of eighteen, while Mischa was only fifteen. The castle was taken as a base. From what I gather, one of the guards upset Mischa. Some say a servant was getting raped, some say guards were trying to rape her."

"Where were you?" I dared to ask.

She cast her eyes towards the fireplace, a hint of shame escaping her grace. "I wasn't there."

"Why?"

"I disappeared for months at a time, as has been my nature for the last millennia. When I finally returned, Hannibal was chained to a wall, with a bag over his head. Mischa was nowhere to be found."

"What did they do to her?"

Lady Murasaki returned her gaze to me. "I do not know."

A chill went down my spine. Where my imagination lacked at the beginning of this journey, it did no longer. I pictured a myriad of possibilities, of what could have happened. Seeing something traumatizing enough to make Hannibal the way he is.

No one knew what happened to her except for Hannibal. That much, I was sure of.

"He refused to let me change him, not wanting eternity without his sister beside him. Too disgusted by my abandonment, he left me to find vengeance his own way."

"I assume he found it?"

"Oh, yes," she cooed. "And in doing so, he finally understood the art of his many gifts. The power taking life gives to those willing to accept it."

The words felt prophetic and through the nausea eating away at my stomach, I imagined a young Hannibal viciously seeking out the men responsible for whatever happened to Mischa. It's what I would do, what I almost did, because of Abigail.

"The next time I saw him, he was a man full grown. Killing had given him new purpose. So I gifted him immortal life and he could pursue such a destiny until every star disappears in the sky."

"I'm surprised he didn't kill you," I blurted out, unable to stop myself.

"Perhaps that is what awaits me, should we ever meet again."

There was something melancholy in her dark eyes, a deep seated loneliness that I understood.

"I warned him," she sighed. Glass-covered eyes revealing some emotion, though I knew not if it was genuine. "Bonding with a human is misery."

"You can't always control who you fall in love with."

She held my attention for a long moment, before finally standing from her chair. I watched as she floated across the large library, to the same bookcase that housed her many vials of potions. When she returned to me, she held a small, rectangular box in her hand. It was wooden, garnished with gold trim and intricate carvings on the side.

"I will let you live, Will Graham," she announced when standing before the fireplace. "I will even tell you where Hannibal is... but you must do two things for me."

I got to my feet in an instant, my head swimming with the idea of knowing the end of my path was near in sight.

"For trespassing and awakening the dead inside these walls, I will take your ruby as payment."

I clenched my jaw. The ruby had been with me through so much, it felt like abandoning my dogs all over again. Bedelia knew I could use my power without it, that maybe it'd be a crutch for me in the future, but it still hurt to part with it.

"Secondly, you must deliver something to Hannibal. How you give it to him, is entirely up to you."

She held out her hands and I carefully opened the lid of the box. Inside, cushioned in rich, red velvet, was an exquisite dagger. It's hilt was dark with golden spirals carved into it. The sheath was of a similar fashion, ancient looking and brilliantly gold.

I touched it with my fingertips and gasped when I heard a whisper make its way into my ear.

I hadn't been able to hear any remnants of a soul within the walls of the library. The dead were kept away here, all except for whatever was attached to the dagger.

When unsheathed, I was in awe of the beautiful markings engraved on the silver. A large snake curling down the length of it, it's mouth eating the head of a small human.

I tilted it a bit more towards the fire and could see a word carved near the hilt.

DVARAS

I stared so long, I could make out a shadow surrounding the steel. It was weak, barely vibrating, but there all the same. My breath got caught in my throat.

"Do you hear her?"

My eyes were burning with the emotion I felt. I couldn't name it, not even if I wished to. It coiled its way past my ribs and squeezed my beating heart.

No, I couldn't really hear her.

I could *feel* her.

Mischa.

Chapter End Notes

This took me so long because I'm trying not to jump in the middle of traffic!
Anyway, I imagine Lady Murasaki looking like Gong Li (Hatsumomo from Memoirs of a Geisha?)
Yes, Alana is dead. I'm sorry, I didn't like her character. I just found her obnoxious, but maybe that's because of how men wrote her?
Anyway, hopefully this is making any sense. I'm having fun with it, hope you are too!
Thanks for reading!
Let me know your thoughts!!<333

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!